

weekend

Northern Lights

Compagnie Marie Chouinard brings '24 Preludes' and 'Rite of Spring' to Aspen



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Elijah Brown and Julio Cesar Hong in "24 Preludes by Chopin."

MARIE CHOUINARD/COURTESY PHOTO

Chopin, Stravinsky and Marie Chouinard

French-Canadian ballet company brings a provocative program to Aspen



MARIE CHOUINARD/COURTESY PHOTO

Mathilde Monnard and Dominique Porte in "Rite of Spring."

The bold and brilliant Montreal-based choreographer Marie Chouinard is bringing two of her ballet company's signature pieces to Aspen. In "24 Preludes by Chopin" and "Rite of Spring," Chouinard harnesses the power of iconic music by Chopin and Stravinsky and her company's skillful dancers to take an audience on what she calls "a voyage into the human soul."

Presented by Aspen Santa Fe Ballet, the one-night guest performance runs this evening at the Aspen District Theatre.

After a distinguished career as a solo performer and choreographer, Chouinard — who The New York Times once dubbed "Montreal's extroverted bad-girl choreographer" — formed her company in 1990. Her work with Compagnie Marie Chouinard utilizes elements of contemporary and classical ballet along with dance traditions from around the world, honoring the wonders of the human body in potent ballets of primal and carnal inspiration.

The 10-dancer company travels the world speaking the international language of dance. Recent tour stops have included Europe, India and the U.S. Audiences are essentially the same everywhere, Chouinard believes.

"We are basically all human beings and all relate to works of art — it's like listening to Bach or something, the human brain reacts very similarly," she said earlier this summer from Venice, where Chouinard directs the dance program from the Venice Biennale. "I don't see so many differences. It's the human soul in a work of art."

While both of the works in Saturday's program are responses to classical music, these one-act pieces — bisected by an intermission — don't necessarily complement one another. Chouinard wants each to stand on its own.

"It's like if you go in a museum and see two different paintings by one artist in the

same room," she explained. "It's like that." "24 Preludes," performed with a live pianist, premiered in 1999 in Vienna. Chouinard recalled that she had been listening to Chopin without work in mind, simply for pleasure.

"One day there was a shock," she recalled. "I was like, 'Oh my god, I have to choreograph on this piece!' It was a sudden, strong, emergency urge. I needed to do this."

She describes it as the choreographic equivalent of a short-story collection. Each of these 24 distinct and miniature ballets — some less than a minute long — creates its own world from a solo or duet or group performance.

"They are all very short stories, short essays — each one a different picture of the human soul, a different way of approaching the soul, another piece of the soul," Chouinard explained. "And yet each one is complete. There is a totality in each of the little pieces."

Her groundbreaking "Rite of Spring," created in 1993, is a 50-minute visual spectacle. Unlike other ballets set to the Stravinsky masterpiece, Chouinard's "Rite" — performed by topless, body-painted dancers — doesn't have a story or characters. Instead, it is her distilled visual expression of the creation and meaning of life itself and the body's synchronicity with sound. Chouinard once described her process in choreographing it by saying "it is as if I were dealing with the very moment after the instant life first appeared."

Grappling with the history of "Rite of Spring" — which is said to have incited a riot at the premiere of Vaslav Nijinsky's scandalous (for its time) ballet in Paris in 1913 — is of no interest to Chouinard. Shrugging off its cultural baggage, the choreographer said she made her "Rite"

Andrew Travers
The Aspen Times

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NICOLAS RUEL/COURTESY PHOTO

Carol Prieur and James Viveiros in Marie Chouinard's "Rite of Spring."

BALLET

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as if she was the first to hear and dance to Stravinsky's orchestral work.

"All I want to do is connect to Stravinsky, to the music that he created — not with the history of the music, just the vibrational, rhythmical quality of the music and the way that it gets into your ears," she said. "I am not thinking about how many choreographers have done it before, the history of it — I really don't care."

Stravinsky's score — with all of its dissonance and wild, shifting rhythms — remains a wellspring of inspiration for Chouinard.

If You Go ...

What: Compagnie Marie Chouinard, presented by Aspen Santa Fe Ballet

Where: Aspen District Theatre

When: Today, 4 and 8 p.m.

How much: \$36 to \$94

Tickets: Wheeler Opera House box office; www.aspenshowtix.com

"It's a challenge but it is such a gift to a choreographer," she said. "All of these rhythms that are overlaying one another and changing and you can feel it in your body. It's wonderful. Thank you, Stravinsky."

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into the
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*More on Aspen Santa Fe Ballet's
one-night performance on page B5*